Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Engaging with families living in low-income households through system change, place-based initiatives

EQUALITY AND WELFARE

social research

Contents

Acknowledgements

This report was produced by Sarah Goulding, a Scottish Graduate School of Social Sciences – Scottish Government intern, who was situated in the Poverty Research and Place-based Social Justice Analysis Teams during her three month internship.

Executive Summary

Background

Eradicating child poverty is a key priority for Scottish Government. The second Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, Best Start, Bright Futures, acknowledges how complex the support system for families living in low income can be and it outlines commitments to improving this system and ensuring it works for families. In particular, the Plan committed to a number of actions and initiatives focused on delivering this 'system change' and testing different approaches to providing person-centred solutions for families in poverty.

The evaluation of system change initiatives to tackle child poverty aims to provide learnings on how the child poverty system is working for families. Early evidence from the evaluation showed a gap in knowledge around engagement with underreached families.

This report explores the enablers and barriers to successful engagement with families living in low-income households across system change, place-based initiatives. The extent to which underreached families have been reached by initiatives is also considered, while key learnings from across the report are drawn together to highlight areas of importance when engaging with families across system change, place-based initiatives.

For the purposes of this report, engagement is defined as the involvement of families, adults and/or children and young people, in the design, implementation, delivery or evaluation of the initiative.

Key Findings

What are the enablers of successful engagement with families?

Staffing. The keyworker approach adopted across initiatives is particularly valuable in providing a trusted point of contact, alongside holistic and person-centred support.

Partnership working. Collaborative working across local authorities, third sector partners and multiple agencies can help to deliver services that work for families and provide them with wraparound, holistic support. A single point of access can be valuable in initial engagement with families and reduces barriers to accessing services.

Accessibility. There is value in placing services in communities rather than in centralised locations. Co-location of services also allows for ease of access and can reduce the stigma of accessing services, while also normalising services.

Flexible services. The ability to offer flexible, responsive and tailored support is crucial in providing holistic support and ensuring engagement with families. This entails listening to the needs of families and providing support services that fit their needs.

Trust. Building trust is a fundamental enabler to engagement and extends across all levels of the system. All relationship building takes time and it is important to ensure adequate

time is given to allow for a consistent and considered approach. Building trust can be crucial in engaging families who have not yet engaged with services before.

Co-design. To varying degrees, participation in design and delivery is occurring across all initiatives. Co-design is a particularly collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders who come together to design and develop initiatives.

What are the barriers to successful engagement with families?

Accessibility. For the most part, accessibility was considered and acted as an enabler of engagement. However, when it is not fully considered, it can act as a barrier.

Stigma. Poverty stigma is complex and deeply engrained. A previous negative experience can be a barrier for engagement, and partnership working. To minimise stigma, drawing on the trusted relations between third sector organisations and local communities was seen to be invaluable. There are examples of initiatives and services taking innovative approaches e.g. setting up a café, open door policies. These can help to reach people who have had little or negative previous contact with services. Further, language can play an important role in reducing stigma. It is advisable for services to use accessible, non-labelling, stigmatising language across their services.

Recruitment and retention of staff. Recruiting and retaining staff to work on short-term, fixed-term (limited to funding periods) contracts can be problematic. Working across partners to fill posts with individuals holding the necessary knowledge, experience and skills can help to fill recruitment gaps.

Data sharing. Data sharing is a key barrier to engaging families. Data sharing can help to identify and target families most in need of assistance. However, evidence in this report suggests data sharing is an on-going challenge and is an area for further consideration to maximise reach of initiatives.

Fear of loss of household income. For some families, a fear of cuts to benefits can be a barrier to accessing support. This is a particularly pertinent challenge in the current economic climate where families may be facing compounding disadvantage. This fear can prevent families from accessing and engaging with support. It is important to build trust, and provide accessible services, for these families so that they feel able to return to services when their situation changes.

To what extent are underreached families being reached?

Priority family groups are engaged with across initiatives. Some initiatives encountered challenges engaging minority ethnic families, with language and cultural barriers cited.

The importance of building trust between services and families and ensuring promotion of services is seen as key to ensuring engagement with other marginalised families at risk of poverty, such as families with non-working adults in the household.

However, trying to understand why families are not being reached, if they are not initially engaging with a service, can be a challenge. Further work is required in this area to better understand non-engagement.

What lessons have been learned?

There are key lessons which can guide those working to engage families living in low-income households across system change, place-based initiatives.

Taking time. To ensure the long lasting success of initiatives, all stakeholders should be involved in meaningful discussions (including families), and there should be an acceptance that it takes time to build trust and embed change. This needs to be accounted for in grant funding and monitoring outcomes.

Importance of local input in service design. Local communities should be able to participate in the development of services. This can be done to varying degrees considering the feasibility of the approach and referring to appropriate published guidance.

Value of staff. The key worker approach was particularly valued. Staff can be crucial to the success of initiatives and it is essential to support staff development, ensure sound understandings of core values and principles and allow time to support personalised and flexible engagement with individuals.

Challenges of data sharing. There is an array of challenges in data sharing across partnership working. Greater awareness on what is and what is not possible is required. From there, those working across initiatives can make steps to outline the key processes required to make it happen.

Fairer Futures Partnerships. Initiatives in this report are working to provide flexible, person-centred whole family support in a place-based way that works for local communities. These principles are found in the expansion of fairer futures partnerships which were outlined in the recent Programme for Government and is seen to be instrumental in eradicating child poverty. The report findings highlight the value of this approach when engaging families.

Conclusions

There is evidence across all initiatives of dedicated and successful work in engaging and maximising the reach of services for families living in low-income households. The diversity of initiatives in their level of engagement highlights how initiatives can adopt different approaches to provide individuals with opportunities to engage, and be engaged, across service design, implementation, delivery and evaluation.

However, many barriers for engagement are systemic issues, such as staff recruitment and retention, and poverty stigma. This highlights the need for system change initiatives to provide the building blocks to create long-lasting changes to structures and cultures.

Many of these initiatives are small-scale or in the early stages of implementation – and change takes time to embed and impacts for families will also take time to be seen.

1. Introduction

Eradicating child poverty is a key priority for the Scottish Government. The second Tackling Poverty Delivery Plan, Best Start, Bright Futures (BSBF) acknowledges the complexity within the current support system and the need to work in different ways to ensure join up and alignment across the child poverty system. In particular, BSBF sets out the need to understand how well the system is working for families and outlines an approach to understand the cumulative impact of policies in the child poverty context. The evaluation of system change initiatives to tackle child poverty aims to understand the effectiveness of system change, place-based initiatives in tackling child poverty.

The baseline report found that maximising the reach of initiatives and ensuring accessibility for 'hard to reach' and other marginalised families was an ongoing challenge. In particular, the report noted the need for further consideration of those from the six priority family groups – lone parents; mothers under 25; minority ethnic families; families with three or more children; families with a baby under one; and families with a child or adult with a disability – and those facing multiple and intersecting disadvantages.

Research aims

The overarching aim of this report is to draw key learnings for policy makers on engaging with families living in poverty across system change, place-based initiatives.

The following three research questions have guided this research.

1. What are the enablers and barriers to successful engagement with families living in poverty / low-income households? This includes from service design, implementation to service delivery and evaluation.

2. To what extent have underreached families (this includes priority families, but also individuals/families with other equality characteristics) been engaged in system change, place-based initiatives? This includes from service design, implementation to service delivery and evaluation.

3. What lessons have been learned which may help us to engage families living in low-income households in service design, implementation, delivery and evaluation?

Research approach

Eight initiatives were selected to be in scope for this research project. These are initiatives which have been included in the early learnings from the wave one of the system change evaluation. These include:

- Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund
- Dundee Pathfinder
- Glasgow Pathfinder
- Family Wellbeing Partnership
- No One Left Behind
- School Age Childcare
- Whole Family Wellbeing Funding
- Learnings from the Anchor for Families Project

The analysis in this report is based on:

- Published evidence on place-based, system change initiatives from policy and analytical teams in Scottish Government. Reports were reviewed to identify evidence relating to family engagement across projects.
- Interviews with relevant Scottish Government policy and analytical colleagues.[1] In total, eight interviews were completed, comprising 16 individuals from across seven policy initiatives.

Report outline

Firstly, this report outlines how we defined key concepts as part of our research approach. This overview defines system change, a place-based approach and engagement in the context of this report and adopted research approach.

Then, the report provides an overview of the enablers to successful engagement with families living in low-income households. This provides insights into the value of staffing, partnership working, accessible, flexible and responsive services, establishing trust across relationships, and co-designing services.

The report moves on to consider the barriers to successful engagement with families, particularly accessibility, stigma, the recruitment and retention of staff, data sharing and fear of a loss of household income.

The report then considers the extent to which underreached families have been engaged to date across system change, place-based initiatives to tackle child poverty.

[1] See Appendix A for the letter of engagement and Appendix B for the template for data collection.

Finally, conclusions are offered which summarise the key themes and learnings from the report findings.

2. Defining engagement with families across system change, place-based approaches to tackle child poverty

Key messages

This chapter defines key concepts in the context of this report. These are: system change, place-based approaches and engagement.

- System change initiatives are ones which aim to make 'structural and procedural changes' to and within organisations that support families living in low-income households.
- Place-based approaches are underpinned by the Place Principle, with the recent Programme for Government highlighting the value of place-based approaches to the Scottish Government's priority to eradicate child poverty.
- Engagement and participation are embedded through the Scottish Approach to Service Design and the Participation handbook. These are practical guides to support and enable the Scottish Government's vision for public participation.

This chapter defines system change, a place-based approach and engagement in the context of this report which seeks to explore engagement with families living in low-income households through system change, place-based initiatives.

What is system change?

The analysis in this report is drawn from evidence on engagement with families living in poverty across system change, place-based policies. System change initiatives focus on making 'structural and procedural changes' to and within the organisations that support families living in low-income households and/or families living in poverty. This definition is adopted throughout the broader Evaluation where we note that such changes can include, but are not limited to, changes in:

- The types of services available
- The ways in which families are contacted and brought into the system
- The extent to which the right families are reached
- Methods of identifying and targeting families that need support
- The complexity and length of families' journeys through the system.

The initiatives in scope for this wider Evaluation were selected as they seek to:

- Ensure the design and delivery of services is based on the distinctive needs of individual communities through a place-based approach
- Provide a holistic and person-centred approach to support that wraps around the needs of the individual
- Collaborate across the public, third and/or private sectors and between local and national partners, with join-up in the range of support provided to help move people out of poverty
- Move away from crisis responses towards more preventative action

What is a place-based approach?

In 2019, the Scottish Government and the Conventions of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) adopted the Place Principle which seeks to encourage a more integrated, collaborative and participative approach to services across all sectors. This approach recognises that places are shaped by the community around them and that those people in the community are essential to addressing the needs of the local area. Working across organisational and sectoral boundaries is a crucial part of this vision for collaboration and is the overarching principle for place-based working in Scotland.

In the 2024-2025 Programme For Government the value of place-based approaches were recognised in terms of their ability to provide effective whole family support and assist in helping in the Scottish Government priority to eradicate child poverty. In particular, place-based approaches were contributing to greater partnership working, providing improved support for families in need, and helping services to reshape and develop services to deliver effective, more sustainable support (system change).

What is engagement?

In 2024, the Scottish Government published a Participation Handbook which outlines good practices for public engagement. Participation is the overarching term used to describe how people are involved in decisions which affect and/or are important to them. Participation can be classified using the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation. This is a tool which highlights the diversity and range of roles people can play in a government engagement process. Each level of engagement serves a different function with different levels appropriate at each point of policy development and decision-making. The levels of engagement are:

- **Inform**: providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.
- **Consult**: obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- **Involve**: working directly with the public throughout the process to ensure their public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
- **Collaborate**: partnering with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

- **Empower**: placing final decision making in the hands of the public.

Additionally, the Scottish Government supports the National Standards for Community Engagement which sets out best practice for public bodies in engaging with communities. There are seven standards:

- **Inclusion**: we will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement
- **Support**: we will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.
- **Planning**: there is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.
- **Working together**: we will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.
- **Methods**: we will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.
- **Communication**: we will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.
- **Impact**: we will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.

For the purposes of this report, engagement is defined as the involvement of families, adults and/or children and young people, in the design, implementation, delivery or evaluation of the initiative. This broad definition of engagement has enabled us to provide examples of successes and challenges in engagement with families which have emerged across the life cycle of initiatives.

3. What enables successful engagement with families living in low-income households?

Key Messages

Across the eight initiatives the following enablers were identified as supporting engagement with families living in low-income households.

- **Staffing of initiatives**. The keyworker approach adopted across initiatives can be valuable in providing a trusted point of contact, alongside holistic and person-centred support. Staff were often from the local community, or held local knowledge, which supported them to understand the needs of the families in the community.
- **Partnership working**. Collaborative working across local authorities, third sector partners and multiple agencies can help to deliver services that work for families and provide them with wraparound, holistic support. A single point of access can be valuable in initial engagement with families and reduces barriers to accessing services.
- **Accessibility**. There is value in placing services in communities rather than in centralised locations. Co-location of services also allows for ease of access and can reduce the stigma of accessing services, while also normalising services.
- **Flexible services**. The ability to offer flexible, responsive and tailored support is crucial in providing holistic support and ensuring engagement with families. This entails using feedback loops - listening to the needs of families and providing support services that fit their needs.
- **Trust**. Building trust is a fundamental enabler to engagement and extends across all levels of the system. All relationship building takes time and it is important to ensure adequate time is given to allow for a consistent and considered approach. Building trust can be crucial in engaging families who have not yet engaged with services before.
- **Co-design**. To varying degrees, participation in design and delivery is occurring across all initiatives. Co-design is a particularly collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders who come together to design and develop initiatives.

This chapter of the report explores the enablers to successful engagement with families living in low-income households across system change, place-based initiatives. Eight key themes were identified and are discussed below, with examples drawn from the evidence to highlight practices and learnings to date.

Staffing of initiatives

Staff are highly valuable to engaging families across initiatives. Across the evidence, the role of staff in providing local knowledge, while being passionate and committed, was critical in driving initiatives forward. For the Dundee Pathfinder, there was value in staff being local to the community, which allowed for the insider knowledge of understanding the needs of the community, and led to staff being able to build trusting, strong relations with families. Additionally, in Shetland, the Anchor project attributes much of their success to the work of staff due to their attitudes, professionalism and commitment to the families engaging with the service.

The attitude and values that staff held were viewed to be crucial to engagement with families, with staff cited to hold attributes of: non-judgement; friendly; approachable; empathetic, and treating families with respect. This is complementary to their professional skills and knowledge to provide support and ability to tailor their package of support to the needs of the community. This was evident across the Early Adopter Communities of School Age Childcare where staff holding the right skills and knowledge to support children with additional support needs (ASN) meant that parents/carers felt safe to leave their children in these services knowing they would have a positive experience with staff skilled to meet their complex needs.

A key worker approach

Families also value the stickability of the “key worker” in the sense that the key worker – or the most appropriate worker – stayed with the individual/family throughout their journey and engagement with services. This was found across a range of initiatives, including the Anchor, Family Wellbeing Partnership, No One Left Behind, the Pathfinders and Whole Family Wellbeing Funding. The key worker takes a person centred approach to assess the holistic needs of an individual or the family. The key workers can then provide the service and/or signpost and support them with further referrals while being alongside the family through their journey. This role contributes to the culture of ‘no wrong door’ which refers to how a family should be supported to access the right support at the right time in a system which is easy to navigate. In the Family Wellbeing Partnership, practitioners work with families to build trusting relationships which provide families with confidence that the practitioners are acting upon their best interests. This approach is exemplified as ‘the right thing, at the right time, for the right reason’ with the person who best knows the family, supporting the family.

Across initiatives, there was evidence that once a key worker has built a relationship with the family, they are able to use this to support ongoing engagement, reduce the stress of engaging with various services and reduce the amount of times the family have to tell their story. In the Anchor evaluation this role was likened to a “professional friend” which highlights the breaking down of traditional barriers between families and service providers, but also illustrates the role of a keyworker in providing advocacy, brokering, support and a professional friendship for families living in poverty. Below, the case study highlights the value of the key worker approach in engaging with families across the Pathfinders in Dundee and Glasgow.

Case study spotlight: No Wrong Door: a holistic, person-centred approach to engaging families living in poverty

What does the initiative seek to achieve?

Across the Dundee and Glasgow Pathfinders, a key aim has been to develop a joined-up system which could be evidenced by a 'no wrong' door approach. This is defined as 'regardless of where, how and why a person or family engages in the system, that interaction becomes the gateway to receiving holistic, consistent, and comprehensive support' (Pathfinders Early Implementation Report).

In Glasgow this was delivered through a telephone service 'Glasgow Helps' and in Dundee this was delivered by outreach key workers in the community and workers based in the drop in hub. To do this key workers would ask parents/carers about their broader needs during initial conversations, while drawing on the partnership working across both Pathfinders, to introduce individuals to other services.

What has been learned?

This approach, through the 'no wrong door' principle and key worker approach, delivers person-centred and holistic support. For families experiencing this model their journey through the complex child poverty support system was made simpler through the support on offer. This approach means families have a key contact and do not need to repeat their story, while ensuring appropriate and prompt support.

However, this holistic approach was noted to be labour intensive and time consuming. For some organisations it was easier to manage based on their primary role and their funding structure.

The 'no wrong door' model is one step in joining up systems and enacting system change. This approach demands that staff hold knowledge of other relevant available services, have positive working relationships with other agencies and services in order to successfully support families and ensure appropriate and timely support.

Relevance for engaging with families living in low-income households

This model was valued by parents/carers as it made them feel less vulnerable when accessing support – they did not have to re-tell their story and re-assert their needs. This helped to contribute to a positive experience for parents/carers.

Further, in accessing support, the attitudes of staff, adopting person-centred values, were viewed as non-judgmental and empathetic. For many, this differed from prior attempts at accessing support where they had been made to feel stigmatised or ashamed.

Local knowledge

The local knowledge of staff, and key workers, was further identified to be a significant enabler of engagement. Staff across initiatives often lived in the local, or surrounding, area and/or held local knowledge of the area. This level of understanding of the local area – the strengths, challenges, and, frequently being a part of the local community itself – was key to establishing relationships with families. This highlights a particular value of a place-based approach as the strengths and resources that already exist in a local area can continue to benefit the area.

For the Family Wellbeing Partnership in Clackmannanshire there is an understanding across their work of not 'doing' things to people but changing how services are provided to support how local people want to resolve the issues being faced by their communities. This places emphasis on the value of local knowledge across the system – not just policy makers, service providers and staff, but also that from families with lived experience of their community.

Partnership working

The value of partnership working came through as a strong enabler across many of the initiatives. Partnership working is diverse as illustrated by the examples below.

For local authorities, working collaboratively with third sector partners to deliver services was key to ensuring engagement as these partners often had strong connections to the community and were seen to be a trusted organisation. The Extra Time Programme, a joint initiative between Scottish Government and the Scottish Football Association, to provide school age childcare, provides a strong example of working together to provide a service to meet the needs of local communities. Across the 31 programmes, each club sought to draw upon partnerships and cater to the needs of their local communities in order to provide a range of school age childcare activities (both termtime breakfast and after school clubs and holiday clubs) and opportunities for children's families to engage in services to provide social support and more formal support in employability and further training opportunities. Through partnership working, some programmes were able to ensure that children living in low-income households were prioritised for meal provision and for food hampers. While other programmes found that partnerships were key to adding extra knowledge and expertise to their team and would help them target underreached groups who were currently not benefitting from the Programme.

For the Family Wellbeing Partnership, inter-departmental working was referenced to be reducing siloed working and supporting engagement with families. The increase in inter-departmental working meant families are being provided with holistic services, with staff knowledgeable about other services within the council and able to obtain advice and support from these colleagues or make internal referrals to ensure the needs of families are met. For families, this meant that their experience of support was more coordinated, joined up and simpler, which also enabled them to access a wider range of support.

In Midlothian Council, their Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund project entailed developing a peer researcher programme. Key to the success of the project was the

Council working with a local third sector partner, who had established links with the community, a trusted reputation, and knowledgeable staff who were able to run with this initiative. This project not only relied on the partner to engage with a community, and draw on their expertise, but by training parents/carers with lived experience of poverty to conduct research, has the potential to overcome barriers to, and maximise, engagement.

Additionally, a 'no wrong door' approach was identified to be an enabler in keeping families engaged in services. This model adopts a person-centred and holistic approach to ensuring the needs of families are considered from the outset. This means that families have fewer barriers to accessing services and results in them receiving support through a single point of access. To successfully embed this approach, strong partnership and collaborative working across local authorities and the third sector are critical to ensure access to services for families – while also being dependent on staff being knowledgeable on all support on offer. An example drawn from the Dundee Pathfinder illustrates how a parent/carer accessing the drop-in hub (as a result of targeted door knocking by a keyworker) received help with energy bills, was placed on a waiting list for more suitable housing, and received advice regarding employment and further study.

Accessibility of services

Across the initiatives, making services accessible was a key element to positive engagement with families. Accessibility refers to the physical environment being designed so that all individuals can access services, but it also considers a shift in thinking of delivering services in local communities rather than in centralised locations. In one local authority, the employability initiative was delivered in-person at a café, while the Dundee Pathfinder adopted a drop-in hub model located in a community centre. Further, there are examples from Whole Family Wellbeing Funding initiatives and Anchor which highlight the value of co-locating services in schools which allows for ease of access for parents/carers.

These examples demonstrate that being adaptable to local need and identifying locations with high footfall, or central to the local community, enables individuals to engage with services that they may not have done otherwise. This approach relies on good partnership working to allow this type of collaboration and co-location of services. It also requires local knowledge to be able to identify these sites.

Further, the location of services has helped to lessen the experience of stigma for some families accessing services. Through co-location, individuals accessing services felt they were not as easily identifiable as someone attending a building to access a particular support service. Thus, helping to reduce feelings of stigma in accessing support. This was of value in the approach to Anchor which drew on local knowledge, the lack of anonymity in everyday island life, to provide co-located services which normalised services but also reduced the identifiability of individuals using the services.

Flexible and responsive services

Many of the initiatives referenced the flexibility and responsiveness of their services which supported initial and ongoing engagement. Flexibility of approach, in terms of meeting families in locations which are suited to them, listening to their needs and staff tailoring their approach to these needs, rather than having a prescribed pathway, was valued by families and staff. For the Anchor project this was a particular strength as services could be designed to grow organically with each family, tailored to their needs and the needs of rural, island life. For one No One Left Behind employability service, this looked like creating a meeting space where parents/carers were able to attend with their children – and therefore did not need to worry about childcare. This supported engagement with the service and helped work around parents' schedules and needs. There was also evidence of flexibility and responsive services across School Age Childcare Early Adopter Communities where some local areas were providing specialist services for children with Additional Support Needs in order to maximise engagement with services. Fundamental to this was appropriate training and recruitment of staff to help foster inclusive environments.

Initiatives which had incorporated feedback loops found value for engaging with communities and families. The use of feedback loops are an iterative approach to continuous improvement which allows for feedback to be incorporated into ongoing service design and provision. For example, in the Dundee Pathfinder, it became clear that health concerns were significant barriers to families fully engaging, and benefitting from, available services. Key workers, with their ability to work across policy areas, proactively engaged with Public Health Scotland to develop new routes to engage with the community. Public Health nurses now regularly attend weekly drop-ins and are able to provide private consultations where appropriate, alongside signposting to more bespoke health services. This approach highlights the value in leadership across all levels – with key workers demonstrating flexible, response and person-centred working. However, developing this level of flexibility within services has required explicit buy in from management to support different ways of working.

For outreach and initial engagement, flexible approaches, which consider the local context, have been key. For the Dundee Pathfinder in-person door knocking across the local area helped to raise awareness of the services on offer, while for the Glasgow Pathfinder awareness raising took place in the form of 'tick boxes' on early years childcare registration forms which initiated a telephone call from the Glasgow Helps service – and a holistic needs assessment.

Finally, gathering formal and informal feedback was also seen to be an enabler to engagement. Formal feedback refers to evaluation activity and opportunities for families to feedback to services (e.g. feedback forms). Informal feedback refers to informal conversations between staff and families. Children's Services Planning Partnerships (CSPPs) receiving Whole Family Wellbeing Funding took advantage of existing channels of communication with families to use feedback forms and experience surveys. The Year One Whole Family Wellbeing Funding evaluation report detailed how CSPPs also organised in-person engagement events and workshops with families in order to better understand how to deliver services that met their needs. Additionally, there are examples of CSPPs drawing on discussions between families and key workers during support services to feedback and inform future support. This highlights the iterative and flexible

development of services to support the needs of families and ensure continued engagement with services.

Taking time to build trust

Building trust was a fundamental enabler to engagement. This includes trust across the system – from trusting relationships between senior management and staff on the ground, to the trust developed between families and staff. Evidence across the report to date highlights that relationship building takes time and consistent and considered approaches. From the keyworker approach enabling strong and trusting staff and family relationships to collaborative working being embedded across partnership organisations. There are also novel ways of how local areas have sought to further embed this trust and illustrate the value of all involved in delivering and using services.

Through their Child Poverty Accelerator Fund project Midlothian Council developed a programme for parents/carers to be involved in peer research. Through support from local councillors and senior management the project staff were able to use council buildings and spaces to facilitate sessions and the buy in afforded parents/carers taking part as peer researchers to feel valued and engaged.

The Family Wellbeing Partnership provides another example of ensuring trusting relationships across the whole system. Clackmannanshire Council have facilitated Value Based Leadership sessions which have been attended by young people, communities, front line staff, local leaders, and elected council members. The sessions, supported by Columba 1400, have encouraged space for listening, reflection and training, including on trauma-informed practice. This approach has led to new ways of working through moving to a leadership model where trust and permission are provided across the whole community. This embeds the innovative practice of enabling individuals/partners to do things differently, see what happens, learn, reflect and adapt.

Below, the case study spotlight from the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Year Two report highlights the value of trusting relationships between staff and families, alongside the role of trusting social networks between families, when in engaging families in support services.

Case study spotlight: Drawing trust with, and within, families across Whole Family Wellbeing Funding

What does the programme seek to achieve?

The Whole Family Wellbeing Funding programme aims to transform the way in which family support is delivered, so that families can access the help they need, where and when they need it.

A logic model was developed for the Programme which outlines how the funding is intended to impact children, young people, families and Children's Services Planning Partnership (CSPP) staff. The outcomes in this logic model provide a basis for exploring, in the Year Two Whole Family Wellbeing Funding evaluation report and future evaluation, the extent to which the outcomes have been achieved. This case study focuses on the outcomes of:

- Children, young people and families say they feel positive and trusting of services
- Children, young people and families are aware of how to access relevant family support services

What has been learned?

Families who had accessed support were positive with many detailing the trusting relationships they had developed with support workers. Indeed, an enabler of the outcome of increasing the number of families receiving whole family support through referrals or self-referrals was the role of a trusted support worker. Across the evaluation data, young people, parents and carers noted that trust played a significant role in encouraging other family members to engage with support services. Further, the trusted support worker role was viewed to be a key factor in ensuring engagement with a more diverse range of families, including those who otherwise may have been reluctant to access support.

A key enabler of increasing awareness of how to access relevant family support was word-of-mouth form a trusted source. Many families accessed support services following a recommendation from their social network. It was found that hearing from a trusted source that the service was beneficial and valuable increased the awareness of the support service and encouraged other families to seek out support.

Relevance for engagement with families living in low-income households

Trust is fundamental to service delivery. It has to be earned by staff working across new initiatives, but there is value in building trust to sustain involvement with families and communities. However, there is also value in drawing upon the strength of bonds, through trusted recommendations across social networks, in local communities. Informal word of mouth can be important for engaging and communicating with families.

The role and value of word of mouth for engaging families was also found by those working across the Dundee Pathfinder. The Pathfinders early implementation evaluation report details how the holistic services offered by the local drop-in hub, in the Linlathen area of Dundee, was resulting in people travelling from across Dundee to try and access support at the hub. Word of mouth, and the spreading of trusted recommendations through family and friends, was seen to reduce the 'fear of the unknown' described by individuals.

Participation in the design and delivery of services

School Age Childcare is an umbrella term for a range of initiatives and interventions. Work to engage stakeholders and better understand the needs of those using and delivering school age childcare commenced in 2018. Since then, the Scottish Government has provided funding for a range of interventions, including the Access to Childcare Fund and the Early Adopter Communities. Further, the Scottish Government has worked with children and young people, parents/carers and those delivering school age childcare services to co-design services and to develop The National Children's Charter for School Age Childcare in Scotland. Fundamental to the approach of designing and building a system of school age childcare is that 'the people of Scotland are supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their public services' (School Age Childcare Delivery Framework).

Co-design has been, and is, fundamental to the principles of school age childcare which lie in designing a system which is people-centred and place-based. This level of engagement means that services can be designed and implemented which meet the needs of those using them, while it can also be valuable in ensuring buy-in from local communities as they are invested in the design and delivery of the initiative.

However, it is important to consider the complexity of participatory work and ensure that engagement will result in meaningful impact. It requires careful planning and commitment. This may not be a feasible option for all initiatives.

For example, across Year One and Year Two Whole Family Wellbeing Funding evaluation reports, there were reflections on the importance of co-design for engaging families in services. It was acknowledged that there was limited evidence of family engagement and co-design being used to inform broader service design (beyond individual services), with this likely being due to barriers in staff capacity to engage in training and guidance on co-design – with further limited capacity to apply these skills and knowledge in practice.

The case study below illustrates the process of involving communities in co-designing a system of school age childcare.

Case study spotlight: Developing a system of School Age Childcare through a People Panel

What does the initiative seek to achieve?

The School Age Childcare programme worked with a system change and strategic design consultancy to establish a People Panel. This Panel consisted of parents/carers and childcare providers. In this context, the People Panel refers to a wide array of interactions and engagements that the external partner undertook over time, rather than a more formal panel configuration.

Across Phase One, in 2022, the work engaged over 100 parents/carers and 30 childcare/activity providers and explored experiences of school age childcare – with discussions moving towards developing solutions. This approach enabled people to share their stories and resulted in the gathering of rich, detailed data which identified key barriers and challenges to school age childcare while also allowing for the emergence of design principles for a system of school age childcare.

Across Phase Two, in 2023, engagement was focused in one community to explore with a range of key stakeholders what it might take to engage local people in creating a system of school age childcare that worked for their specific circumstances. This particular phase was therefore focused on moving from discussing problems to collaborating on solutions.

What has been learned?

The learnings from the People Panel have provided in-depth, rich and detailed insights into the complex and varied needs of families when developing a funded school age childcare offer. Ultimately, the People Panel has highlighted the value in creating the conditions in local areas to support the effective co-design of school age childcare services, while also allowing for these experiences to be fed into the design of polices at a national level which support the school age childcare system.

Relevance for engagement with families living in low-income households

This case study illustrates the depth of understanding that can come from co-design work. It also highlights how local communities can be involved in the successful co-design of local services, but also influence national policymaking. This centres people and place in the design of a system that works for them.

However, it is important to note the involvement of an external partner – with this level of co-design demanding skills, expertise and resource in order to be conducted in a meaningful and ethical way.

There were other examples of participation in design and delivery across other initiatives.

The Midlothian Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund project entailed developing a peer researcher programme. In total, 13 community researchers, with lived experience of poverty, were trained in ethnographic peer research methods. These 13 community researchers would then engage with, and interview, up to 10 further families living in poverty. This will culminate in 100 families being engaged in the lifetime of this project. This approach has provided those engaged with the training with new skills and increased confidence. However, as highlighted in the Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund report on Round 1 reflections and lessons, it also provides insights and knowledge into how to overcome barriers to engaging families.

Further, the Anchor Project, in Shetland, adopted a co-constructed and co-produced approach to their evaluation, utilising creative methods to engage families, workers and community stakeholders. The case study below highlights how this innovative approach supported participants to share their story in more accessible way.

Case study spotlight: Using participatory methods to capture the experiences of stakeholders

What did the initiative seek to achieve?

The independent evaluation of Anchor was led by a team from Robert Gordon University and Shetland Council. The research team drew upon participatory action research methods, across three phases, to undertake a co-constructed and co-produced evaluation. The phased approach to evaluation allowed for the journey of Anchor to be illustrated through agreeing a shared understanding of what needs to be done (Phase One), what needs to change (Phase Two) and what the future could look like (Phase Three).

In order to gather data, the research team engaged parents/carers, project workers and key stakeholders working across health and social care, education, police and the third sector. The methods used included workshops, interviews and Photovoice. Photovoice was used as participatory method which can be an open and less intimidating form of eliciting participant perspective. In this method, images generated by the participants, parents/carers and Anchor project workers, were part of the data collection. The use of images and voice notes allowed participants to document and reflect on their unique experiences of Anchor support and provision.

What has been learned?

The phased approach, underpinned by participatory action research methods, allowed for engagement with a diverse range of stakeholders involved in Anchor resulting in the experiences of all key stakeholders to be included in the evaluation. Further, the phased approach to evaluation activity enabled previous phases of work to shape and influence the direction of the next phase.

This approach to evaluation aligns with a person-centred approach – a key Scottish Government policy approach and a fundamental value of the Anchor project. This illustrates how policy principles and values can be embedded across all aspects of an initiative (design, delivery and evaluation).

Relevance for engaging with families living in low-income households

A participatory approach to evaluation provides families with accessible and less intimidating ways of engaging in evaluation activity. Further, utilising less traditional methods, such as Photovoice can allow for the diverse range of experiences to be captured, while also allowing for reflection on the lived experiences of families.

However, as with the previous case study on the School Age Childcare People Panel, it is important to consider the skills, expertise and resource required to use participatory action research methods with families to ensure positive experiences and positive change.

4. What are the barriers to successful engagement with families living in low-income households?

Key Messages

Across the eight initiatives there are key themes which were identified as barriers to engagement with families living in low-income households. Across the themes, there were also learnings in how to overcome these barriers. These include:

- **Accessibility**. For the most part, accessibility was considered and acted as an enabler of engagement. However, when it is not fully considered, it can act as a barrier.
- **Stigma**. Poverty stigma is complex and deeply engrained. A previous negative experience can be a barrier for engagement, and partnership working. To minimise stigma, drawing on the trusted relations between third sector organisations and local communities was seen to be invaluable. There are examples of initiatives and services taking innovative approaches e.g. setting up a café, open door policies. These can help to reach people who have had little or negative previous contact with services. Further, language can play an important role in reducing stigma. It is advisable for services to use accessible, non-labelling, non-stigmatising language across their services.
- **Recruitment and retention of staff**. Recruiting and retaining staff to work on short-term, fixed-term (limited to funding periods) contracts can be problematic. Working across partners to fill posts with individuals holding the necessary knowledge, experience and skills can help to fill recruitment gaps.
- **Data sharing**. Data sharing is a key barrier to engaging families. Data sharing can help to identify and target families most in need of assistance. However, evidence in this report suggests data sharing is an on-going challenge and is an area for further consideration to maximise reach of initiatives.
- **Fear of loss of household income**. For some families, a fear of cuts to benefits can be a barrier to accessing support. This is a particularly pertinent challenge in the current economic climate where families may be facing compounding disadvantage. This fear can prevent families from accessing and engaging with support. It is important to build trust, and provide accessible services, for these families so that they feel able to return to services when their situation changes.

This chapter of the report explores the barriers to successful engagement with families living in low-income households across system change, place-based initiatives. Five key themes were identified and are discussed below, with examples drawn from the evidence to highlight practices and learnings to date.

Accessibility

While accessibility has emerged as an enabler to engagement – as seen in the previous chapter – it can also be a barrier. While it is evident initiatives and services are taking steps to consider and maximise accessibility, there are still challenges and barriers to consider to ensure accessibility for all.

The local drop-in hub approach, adopted by the Dundee Pathfinder, has been a significant enabler (as identified in the previous chapter). However, there were concerns for some families using the service that they did not feel comfortable accessing the services in a public, community space. This is because confidentiality could not be assured in such a location. Further, it has been identified that having a service in such a public location may also prevent families from engaging if they feel there is a lack of anonymity. However, learnings may be taken from the Shetland Anchor project who encountered similar concerns in the design of their service. In order to minimise barriers to engagement arising from concerns of lack of anonymity, project workers who had any connections to a family (personal or professional) did not take on that family's case, while Anchor staff were primarily co-located in schools.

Services reliant upon telephone contact, such as the Glasgow Pathfinder and some services offered through No One Left Behind employability support, found that there could be issues with connectivity and waiting times (telephone calls not being answered or being left on hold or people not getting back to them). However, in the case of the Glasgow Pathfinder, the steps taken to remedy the situation by staff from Glasgow Helps, apologising and restoring confidence in the service, enabled the parent/carer to re-engage and receive help from the service.

All initiatives had identified groups that were harder to reach and were underreached. These groups varied across initiatives. For the Dundee Pathfinder, the drop-in hub was a barrier for disabled people who found getting about the community challenging, while for some parents/carers the opening times of the hub meant it was not possible to access the drop-in hub due to other priorities such as childcare, employment and other appointments. The School Age Childcare Early Adopter Communities have identified that minority ethnic families are a particular group that require further outreach across some local areas. However, local areas had begun to taken steps to investigate how best to provide outreach and engage these families.

Stigma towards poverty and accessing support

A Scottish Government report on public attitudes to poverty highlights there is some stigma surrounding living in poverty, with a recent Citizens' Panel on the impacts of poverty related stigma on benefit take up reporting the complex and deeply engrained nature of this stigma. Across the initiatives it is evident that this awareness of stigma, and attempts to minimise this, have been part of the design process. This includes previous negative experiences of service use, thinking about how services are delivered, and the language used.

Previous negative experiences of service use

A Scottish Government evidence review exploring the risk of marginalisation from the social security system found that previous negative experiences, which can sometimes be traumatising, can be a key barrier to social security engagement. This finding was also evidenced across the initiatives in this project, with the Pathfinders, Whole Family Wellbeing Funding and Anchor evaluations detailing negative public perception of statutory agencies such as His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Scottish Social Security, but also Local Authorities and social work departments. Negative perceptions ranged from: experiences of benefit assessments, appeals and reviews; child protection powers; and access to care and support allocations. This created a feeling of a power imbalance between these agencies and families.

However, across Anchor and the Pathfinders, it was noted that efforts had been made to reduce the obvious links between these statutory services and the voluntary service that was on offer. The partnership working and trust that had been built between families and partnership services meant that statutory services could be in the background and the key worker approach supported engagement with these services when required. Further, for a CSPP, receiving Whole Family Wellbeing Funding, according to practitioners interviewed, families were willing to engage in support due to frontline workers being viewed by families as distinct from social workers. This improved engagement and reduced the negative association with social work that practitioners described as potentially discouraging some families from becoming involved in support.

Rethinking how services are delivered

Across the Pathfinders and the Anchor project, it is clear that the 'no wrong' door approach helped to reduce stigma in accessing support and services. Across Anchor, the open-door policy, whereby no one was turned away, allowed for the development of strong and trusting relationships between families and service workers. This helped to embed, and has been crucial to the success of, Anchor in Shetland.

Further, service providers across initiatives considered the wider needs of families in the design and implementation of their services. For an employability service, underpinned by the No One Left Behind approach, this entailed setting up a café which had services and advice available for those attending. This method was seen to be an informal way of engaging families while reducing stigma and ensuring those who need support can access it. Further, a CSPP receiving Whole Family Wellbeing Funding delivered a mobile barbershop which also included a counselling service which helped to breakdown traditional barriers in accessing support.

These approaches are underpinned by person-centred principles which can be crucial in building trust and reaching people who have had little or negative previous contact with services.

Language

Language can play an important role in reducing stigma and making services welcome. Language use is complex and needs careful consideration and thought to ensure it is used in a way to support engagement rather than create further barriers. This was evident

across Anchor, Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund, No One Left Behind, and School Age Childcare. In reports, and across discussion with Scottish Government colleagues working across these initiatives, it was identified that reducing the use of labelling and stigmatising terms can help to increase engagement. For example, services providing employability support may be more successful in engagement activity if they do not label themselves as such. It was noted that services focused on job seeking or employment can instil a fear of loss of welfare support (see section on Fear of loss of household income for further discussion), while complex terms such as benefit entitlement support may make families feel services are inaccessible. Therefore, it is crucial to consider accessible language in service design, with terms such as 'money advice' being viewed as appropriate and key to engagement.

Examples of this can also be found across the Year Two evaluation report of the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding programme, which highlights how practitioners have to consider how they frame the relevant support to families. For example, when engaging with children and young people it can be beneficial to reframe the initial support offer to an informal activity, such as going for a walk, rather than a formal or structured activity like they would do in school.

Further, when engaging with those with lived experience of living in poverty, it is important to be mindful that people may not define themselves as living in poverty. A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation report on poverty stigma, identified how 'poverty is not an identity nor is it a condition that people living in or with it easily embrace or reclaim'. The reflections on Round 1 of the Child Poverty Accelerator Fund noted how the term poverty should be avoided to move away from stigma associated with this term, and to lead to greater engagement. This is particularly pertinent when engaging with local communities through activities and service provision. The report suggests that engagement could focus on broader structural issues, such as engaging families through money advice or food banks.

Recruiting, retaining, and developing staff

While staffing has been acknowledged as a significant enabler to engaging families living in low-income households, the nature of staffing can also be a barrier. Recruitment of staff across Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund projects was a challenge when projects are short-term which required fixed-term contracts which are often unappealing. However, some projects resolved this challenge by working alongside their delivery partners to fill the post by an existing member of their staff with the necessary knowledge and skills. CSPPs delivering Whole Family Wellbeing Funding activities encountered similar challenges in recruiting staff for fixed term contracts. However, CSPPs had overcome this by filling Whole Family Wellbeing Funding related posts with existing staff, while the Fife's CSPP recruited staff on a permanent basis. This came with the risk of finding new posts for these employees if activities stop beyond the end of funding periods. However, senior management have the intention to make Whole Family Wellbeing Funding 'business as usual' if there is evidence of positive outcomes.

Part of the innovative approach many initiatives are taking involve working in different ways, promoting partnership working and taking a person-centred approach, which demands training and retraining of staff to ensure they are working in this way. This was noted in Clackmannanshire's approach across the Family Wellbeing Partnership and their commitment to values-based leadership and trauma informed practice. In particular, the trauma-informed training has enabled staff working across the Child Wellbeing Partnership strand to enhance their support offer for children with Additional Support Needs resulting in greater engagement with families.

Data sharing

For many initiatives, data sharing between organisations has been a barrier to engaging families. Both Pathfinders have incurred difficulties in negotiating data sharing agreements with the Department for Work and Pensions and Social Security Scotland. This has meant that available data which would help to identify or target priority family groups has been not yet been obtained. For the Early Adopter Communities data sharing agreements were in place across providers and partners. However, this itself caused challenges as not all partners were willing to sign agreements due to a fear of legal repercussions if an error in sharing data was to be made. Meanwhile, CSPPs across the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Programme found challenges in a lack of streamlined and misaligned processes and information management systems. This was identified as the main factor limiting CSPPs from achieving the outcome of using analysed evidence from children, young people and families to help inform multi-agency and partnership planning and service delivery.

The evidence suggests that this is an on-going challenge with regards to engaging families and requires further consideration and work to ensure data is being shared to maximise the reach of initiatives.

Fear of loss of household income

For some families living in poverty, fear of cuts to social security benefits can be a barrier to accessing support. This may be a pertinent concern for families living in poverty who, following the COVID-19 pandemic and Cost of Living Crisis, may have experienced a compounding of their existing disadvantage as a result of rising costs, and limited, if any, ability to manage these crises. For example, a recent Scottish Government report on the Cost of Living Crisis highlights that interventions intended to lessen the impact of rising costs, associated with high inflation, have not addressed the legacy of austerity which resulted in many households entering the Crisis in financial hardship.

In one initiative, there were examples where families engaged with a service, but upon taking a 'better off' assessment, disengaged from the service. This was because the assessment showed, at the present time, they would not increase their household income by being in employment. Further, as discussed in greater detail in the earlier section of stigma, those working across a number of initiatives have noted the importance of not referring to 'employability' with this term being associated with a concern from

parents/carers around loss of benefits. This fear can be a significant barrier to engaging families most in need of the support and it highlights how services need to support unique and diverse family circumstances. For some families, they are not yet at a position to enter into employment, and the aim should be ensuring they are accessing all the support and benefits they are entitled to as well as signposting them to appropriate services. This helps to build trust between families and services with the families then feeling more able to return to services as and when their situation changes. This ensures timely, responsive support, but also meets the individual needs and circumstances of families.

5. To what extent have underreached families been engaged in system change, place-based initiatives?

Key Messages

This chapter sought to understand the extent to which underreached families (such as the priority family types and other marginalised families at risk of poverty) have been engaged with system change, place-based initiatives.

- Priority family groups are engaged with initiatives. Some initiatives encountered challenges engaging minority ethnic families, with language and cultural barriers cited.
- The importance of building trust between services and families and ensuring promotion of services is seen as key to ensuring engagement with other marginalised families at risk of poverty, such as families with non-working adults in the household.
- However, trying to understand why families are not being reached, if they are not initially engaging with a service, can be a challenge. Further work is required in this area to better understand non-engagement.

This chapter of the report considers the extent to which underreached families have been engaged across the system change, place-based initiatives. In particular, we sought to understand the extent to which priority family types, but also other individuals/families with other equality characteristics, were engaged in the initiatives.

Engaging priority families

Many of the initiatives seek to engage families from the priority family types. Below, we outline some of the strategies for engaging with these families as well as outlining some of the barriers.

The Early Adopter Communities for School Age Childcare seeks to target families in the priority groups who are at higher risk of experiencing child poverty. However, the Early Adopter Communities process evaluation report acknowledges the challenges in reaching certain groups across some local areas, such as, minority ethnic families. It was noted that further outreach was required in order to engage these families, with possible support from schools. This was a common theme across other initiatives where there were challenges in reach minority ethnic families with language and cultural barriers often cited as key barriers which needed to be overcome.

As part of the Grant application process, Child Poverty Practice Accelerator Fund projects were asked to consider the prioritisation of one or more of the priority family groups at greatest risk of child poverty. Across Round One and Round Two of the Fund, projects have focused on a range of priority family types across a range of poverty alleviation projects. For example, South Lanarkshire's Round One project has tested a holistic and person-centred approach with the aim of empowering parent/carers of disabled children to engage with available support services. For Round One, Aberdeen will work with lone parents and parents under 25 to identify and co-design a holistic programme of support that best meets their needs.

Additionally, there were examples of initiatives engaging with parents/carers and families to gather feedback, either through feedback loops or through formal evaluation activity. For example, a Local Employability Partnership, underpinned by the No One Left Behind approach, identified that they had a high number of lone parents accessing the service and this group would benefit from more tailored support. This has resulted in a peer-to-peer support offer between parents facing similar barriers. This helps to build confidence amongst parents and helps parents to feel less alone on their employability journey. This has been found to be a positive way to increase engagement amongst this group. Further, the Whole Family Wellbeing Funding Year Two evaluation report, highlights the work of a CSPP who, based on evidence drawn from a review of, and feedback on, their programmes to date, provided additional support for families with children with additional support needs (for example, disabilities and/or neurodiversity). This led to the creation of a specialist practitioner post specifically to support families caring for children with additional support needs.

Engaging other marginalised families at risk of poverty

Across the initiatives, a common group that was cited as under-engaging with services were families with non-working adults in the household. The previous chapters outline possible reasons for this relating to stigma, previous negative experiences and fear of loss of household income. As highlighted earlier, it is important for initiatives to still engage with this group to ensure a trusting relationship is developed between the family and service so that support is utilised as and when required.

Across Local Employability Partnerships, the implementation evaluation report of No One Left Behind, found that people dealing with addictions, working parents, long-term unemployed, and care leavers were commonly difficult groups to reach or engage. However, one Local Employability Partnership staff member described how they are trying to understand the extent to which employability services should be delivered at scale or in a more specialised way to reach those who need support most. For some stakeholders and staff across No One Left Behind improving accessibility looked like better promotion of services, better referral pathways between employability services and other services, greater English for Speakers of Other Languages provision, employing frontline staff with lived experience and taking the time to build more meaningful relationships with those using the service.

A need for a greater understanding of how to reach the underreached

While a range of activities and approaches have been used to engage families, data on, and details of, which families/community groups have been engaged and which families/community groups have not been engaged has not been captured at the level of data collection for this report.[2] This may be an area for further exploration in the broader evaluation of system change, place-based initiatives to tackle child poverty.

An example of this comes from No One Left Behind where Scottish Government colleagues are seeking to conduct work on unmet need across this initiative. They seek to: agree a shared understanding of unmet need; map the extent to which local authorities are gathering data and seeking to understand unmet need in their local areas; explore the possibility of data collection at a national level; and, provide learnings and lessons arising from this work to ensure maximum reach of No One Left Behind.

[2] Across the interviews, both policy and analytical colleagues highlighted this would be known by those delivering the services (e.g. local authorities, third sector organisations), but this level of data collection was outside the remit of this report.

6. What lessons have been learned which may help us to engage families living in low-income households?

Key Messages

There are key lessons which can guide those working to engage families living in low-income households across system change, place-based initiatives.

- **Taking time**. To ensure the long lasting success of initiatives, all stakeholders should be involved in meaningful discussions (including families), and there should be an acceptance that it takes time to build trust and embed change. This needs to be accounted for in grant funding and monitoring outcomes.
- **Importance of local input in service design**. Local communities should be able to participate in the development of services. This can be done to varying degrees considering the feasibility of the approach and referring to appropriate published guidance.
- **Value of staff**. The key worker approach was particularly valued. Staff can be crucial to the success of initiatives and it is essential to support staff development, ensure sound understandings of core values and principles and allow time to support personalised and flexible engagement with individuals.
- **Challenges of data sharing.** There is an array of challenges in data sharing across partnership working. Greater awareness on what is and what is not possible is required. From there, those working across initiatives can make steps to outline the key processes required to make it happen.
- **Fairer Futures Partnerships**. Initiatives in this report are working to provide flexible, person-centred whole family support in a place-based way that works for local communities. These principles are found in the expansion of fairer futures partnerships which were outlined in the recent Programme for Government and is seen to be instrumental in eradicating child poverty. The report findings highlight the value of this approach when engaging families.

This chapter of the report collates the key learnings from the data gathered from the analysis of published reports and the interviews.

Time for development and delivery

A key learning that emerged across all initiatives was the importance of ensuring adequate time at each stage of design, implementation, delivery and evaluation phases. For the Dundee Pathfinder, there was initial pressure to start delivery of the service versus the

need for planning and engagement to shape delivery of service. This feeling of a need to 'rush to action' lead to tensions between partners as they had not had the time to build the trusting partnerships required for effective co-working and co-delivery of services. While the challenges had been resolved, it was noted that for future projects, having dedicated time for each stage could be helpful. Further, the evaluation report of the school age childcare early adopter communities highlights the value service staff and local stakeholders placed in taking time to embed change and build trust in the early stages of design. This can be critical for ensuring the longevity and success of initiatives when engaging with families.

Therefore, the time spent on building the foundation blocks of trust, while co-designing services and embedding delivery, needs to be accounted for in grant funding and monitoring outcomes.

Importance of local input in service design

Co-design is fundamental to the development of the services. To varying degrees, all initiatives engaged in co-design.

School Age Childcare has embedded co-design principles in their delivery framework, while other initiatives sought to draw upon experiences of families and staff to inform the design and development of their initiatives. The embedded co-design approach of School Age Childcare highlights the value placed in the principles of person-centred and place-based approaches.

However, this work takes time, can be complex and requires careful planning, resources and commitment to ensure meaningful impact. It may not be a feasible option for all initiatives. There is useful guidance for those seeking to engage and participate with local communities. The Scottish Government Participation Handbook outlines good practice in public engagement, while the National Standards for Community Engagement sets out best practice for public bodies in engaging with communities

Value of staff

Staffing of the initiatives has been covered as both an enabler and barrier (see Chapters Three and Four for further information), but it also emerged as a learning point.

The quality of staff was acknowledged and appreciated by both those who were managing the initiatives and the service users. The staff were valued for their ability and time to actively listen in an empathic and non-judgmental way and for their welcoming approaches and professionalism.

Key workers were fundamental to the majority of initiatives and were frequently seen as key contributors to the success of initiatives. However, the key worker approach is not without its issues with this approach requiring investment in time with families and users of services in order to build up trusting relationships. This enables engagement and can have

other positive impacts, such as empowerment and confidence building. However, as highlighted in our baseline report on learnings from system change, place-based initiatives, the time taken to implement initiatives means that it takes time to see impact for families and this can lead to challenges with staff commitment and motivation. Further, there is a risk of initiatives where there is a reliance of particular, strong staff members who are fundamental to the success of initiatives – and this is not a sustainable approach for services.

Additionally, an important learning comes from the Pathfinders early implementation process report which recommends local staff to be recruited into the Pathfinders where possible, with steps taken to share knowledge and intelligence between staff and organisations. This would help to reduce the loss of learning that comes from reliance on key staff members. A proposed mechanism to do this would be to create an 'information store', with access for all Pathfinder partners, to capture, share and update information at the local level.

Staff can be crucial to the success of initiatives and it is essential to support staff development, ensure sound understandings of core values and principles and allow time to support personalised and flexible engagement with individuals.

Challenges of data sharing

Data sharing across partners is a key learning point – with much learning and understanding still being developed in this area. There an array of challenges in data sharing across partnership working, with some of these outlined in Chapter Four. This suggests that this is an area which needs to be considered further by those working across system change, place-based initiatives, particularly in terms of maximising reach and engagement for families living in poverty. As outlined in the Pathfinders early implementation report, the development of localized joint case management systems could enable targeting of parents/carers and referral pathways, while providing opportunities to feed into monitoring and evaluation.

The report findings suggest that there is a need to raise awareness of what is and what is not possible with regards to data sharing – and what they key processes may be to make the possible happen..

A 'fairer futures partnership' approach

Initiatives in this report are working to provide flexible, person-centred whole family support in a place-based way that works for local communities. This approach is found in the expansion of fairer futures partnerships which was outlined in the recent Programme for Government and is seen to be central in helping to achieve the key priority of eradicating child poverty. By investing in initiatives which innovate, join up-services and support families, we can build an evidence base to share learnings across Scotland and provide a template for future change and improvement. The findings highlighted in this report

illustrate the value of this approach when engaging families, and the learnings that have arisen can help to inform future engagement.

7. Conclusions

This report has drawn evidence from published reports and interviews with key Scottish Government colleagues working across a range of system change, place-based initiatives which seek to tackle child poverty. The primary focus of this report has been to understand the engagement of families across these initiatives, with an intention to better understand where more support is required to engage underreached groups, and identify lessons to share with other initiatives working with families across similar initiatives.

Across initiatives there are a variety of examples of dedicated and successful work in engaging, and maximising reach of services for families living on a low income. The positive value of staff, place-based principles and partnership working repeatedly came through. This, in combination can promote engagement and maximise reach of services across local communities.

The diversity of initiatives in their level of engagement highlights how initiatives can adopt different approaches to provide individuals with opportunities to engage, and be engaged, across service design, implementation, delivery and evaluation.

However, many of the barriers to successful engagement are systemic issues. For example, around recruitment and retention, or poverty stigma. This highlights the need for system change initiatives to provide the building blocks that create long-lasting change to structures and cultures.

Many of these initiatives are small-scale or in the early stages of implementation – and change takes time to embed and impacts for families, in terms of maximum reach and engagement, may also take time.

Appendix A – Letter of engagement

Engaging with Families living in low-income households through system change, place-based initiatives Collation of key evaluation information

We have previously engaged with you in order to gather information on your policy area/initiative and if there are any system change elements to this work.

We are now in the second phase of our evaluation which involves commissioning updates of evidence from teams in order to provide insights into how initiatives are engaging with families across their initiatives.

This is a small-scale data gathering exercise and will be followed by individual meetings with each policy area/initiative in order to provide more depth to the responses provided in this template.

We are working towards the following timescales:

Action	Date
Commissioning email sent out	26th November 2024
Responses submitted	4th December 2024
Individual meetings with areas	4th to 13th December 2024
Summary report	31st January 2025

Your help with the completion of this template will help us to answer key research questions and develop the phase two area of our work. Please complete it in as much detail as you can. However, if you are unsure on your response(s), that is ok. Any gaps will be filled in during the individual meetings.

Thank you!

Appendix B – Template for data collection

Engaging with families with low-income or living in poverty – collation of evidence for synthesis analysis

1. Name of initiative:

2. Name of person(s) and role completing this template:

3. Does the strategic aims of the initiative/overall policy consider engagement with families across service design and/or delivery?

4. Does the logic model/theory of change for the initiative consider engagement with families?

5. In what ways have families in low-income households been engaged in service design and/or delivery?

6. How has the initiative engaged with underreached families (e.g. priority families, children and young people, and/or those with other equality characteristics known to be at higher risk of poverty)?

7. In the context of your own policy, what have been the most effective methods of engagement for engaging families living on a low-income ?

8. What have been the least effective methods of engagement for engaging families living in low-income households and/or underreached families?

9. Within the initiative is it possible to identify key barriers that have hindered or prevented engagement with families and/or underreached families?

   If these barriers have been overcome, please share what measures were taken to achieve this.

10. Are there any groups that you intended to reach by your initiative, but were unable to do so?

    For example, there may be groups that may not be being reached, such as those with care experience, minority ethnic families, please provide details.

11. Is there any other planned future engagement with families living in low-income households across service design and/or delivery?

    This may include planned future work phases and/or work yet to happen.

social research

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This document is also available from our website at www.gov.scot.
ISBN: 978-1-83691-494-5

The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Produced for
the Scottish Government
by APS Group Scotland
PPDAS1590734 (04/25)
Published by
the Scottish Government,
April 2025

GSR
GOVERNMENT SOCIAL RESEARCH
Social Science in Government

Social Research series
ISSN 2045-6964
ISBN 978-1-83691-494-5

Web Publication
www.gov.scot/socialresearch

PPDAS1590734 (04/25)